

Retain Members by Leading an Effective Meeting

By

Peggy L. McNamara

Those of us who have attended thousands of business and organization meetings realize that there is a vast difference between a meeting that excites attendees and one that puts them to sleep. If one of your meeting goals is to retain or gain members for your organization, a crucial question you must candidly ask yourself-and honestly answer-is, "Which type of meeting have I been leading?"

The first step toward conducting a meeting that will generate enthusiasm and inspire people to return time and time again is to accept responsibility for the environment that you create. I am not just referring to the color of the tablecloths here, although it does help to have a cheery physical environment; I am talking about the emotional environment.

Members of any organization look to the group's leadership to inspire and excite them--not just to stand up front and ask for more volunteers, but to remind members why they joined the organization and what it stands for. Share your mission statement at the opening of every single meeting. Remind members why your chapter meets every month, and what's in it for them.

Have a banner or poster made, with your "purpose" on it. Take it along and display it in a prominent place wherever and whenever your group meets.

Be proud of who you are. Imagine how your membership could grow if each and every one of your members knew what you, and your organization, stood for!

A second item to be aware of is the "presence" that you bring to the meeting yourself. I have seen more association chapter presidents who appear worn-out and pessimistic than I care to remember. I am baffled that the chosen leader of an organization can allow themselves to become a voice of discouragement rather than one of enthusiasm for attaining chapter goals. Various studies suggest that 90% of what we communicate is transmitted through our body language and tone of voice, and only 10% through the words that we speak. As chapter leaders, we far too often concentrate on the correct agenda or menu items without realizing the importance of (or even being conscious of) the body language that conveys much, if not most, of our message.

Do you stand by the entrance and welcome members--and visitors--with a firm handshake and a sincere smile? Are you gracious with and attentive to your members, or are you forever running around trying to conquer last-minute details? When was the last time you stood up front and thanked your members, with all of your heart, for everything that they do? The world is a hectic place. Granted, as chapter leaders you have additional responsibilities to attend to, and additional demands on your time, but so what! That is expected. Members don't want to hear about your problems and frustrations. They want to see and feel that they are a valuable part of the organization's success, and your sincerity will go a long way toward conveying that.

A third aspect of running an effective meeting is to keep it on a tight time-line. I understand this is easier said than done, but members really appreciate punctuality and brevity. Respect the time crunch that bedevils everyone these days, and do whatever you can to keep things moving along. Don't be afraid of being aggressive about this. Members will appreciate their leadership taking charge of a meeting and running it efficiently. There is nothing worse than having a meeting drag on longer than necessary due to twenty minutes of idle chit-chat that interested only a few people. Prepare your remarks in advance and share only what is needed from the platform.

One of my favorite quotes comes from Albert Dunning, an editor from the late 1800's, who said, "Great opportunities come to all, but many do not recognize them." Every meeting that you conduct is an opportunity: an opportunity for retaining members, inspiring enthusiasm for growth through new members and, above and beyond everything else, an opportunity to make people feel good about the time and energy they expend with your organization.

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Peggy L. McNamara

Author of "My Tender Soul - A Story of Survival"

Publishes monthly e-zine, "Perpetual Life Management"

President/Minnesota Chapter/ Nat'l Speakers Assoc 651-438-2656 -

Direct 651-438-2694 -

Fax 888-269-7771

<http://www.peggymcnamara.com>